



# Towards a new National Women's Strategy 2017-2020


## Consultation Document

*“an Ireland where all women  
enjoy equality with men  
and can achieve their full potential,  
while enjoying a safe and fulfilling life”*



**Gender Equality Division  
Department of Justice and Equality  
November 2016**

Tweets by @DeptJusticeIRL  
#genderbalance




**“The new Strategy needs to speak to the society of today. It must clearly respond to key issues facing women, in all their diversity... I want the strategy to focus also on new issues ... issues faced by young women such as revenge porn, body shaming and online harassment.**

**I want women to be enabled to put themselves forward as leaders in their workplaces, in community organisations, arts organisations, sports organisations and indeed in politics.**

**I want the Ireland of 2021 to be a place where decision-making belongs to women as well as to men.”**

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice  
and Equality,  
Frances Fitzgerald TD,  
*speaking on 9 September 2016*

David Stanton TD,  
Minister of State with special  
responsibility for Equality, Immigration  
& Integration,  
*speaking on 29 September 2016*



**“There can be no place in a modern society for intolerance, discrimination, inequality or exclusion... Our collaborative efforts can lead to the identification of problems and impediments to progress and inclusion, but, more importantly, our combined resources can mobilise resources for change and ensure a better society for all.”**

## MESSAGE FROM THE TÁNAISTE AND MINISTER STANTON

As our economy is growing, more people are getting jobs, and women's representation in politics is greater than ever before, my objective as Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality is to ensure that the possibilities of the present translate into opportunities for women across Ireland. In our Programme for a Partnership Government we have included a range of measures that are intended to benefit women directly or indirectly. A vital element of this package is the renewal of the National Women's Strategy.

The new Strategy needs to speak to the society of today. It must clearly respond to key issues facing women in all their diversity. In preparing this paper, our intention was not to be prescriptive but rather to seek feedback from you on the proposed objectives and priorities. In particular, I would like to hear from you about what you feel are the most important obstacles to be overcome and what we need to do to achieve this.



This is an important opportunity for everyone to inform and assist in shaping national policy to 2020, to ensure continued progress is made towards a society in which women enjoy equality with men and are empowered to achieve their full potential.

*Frances Fitzgerald TD  
Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality*

Much work remains to facilitate the full participation of women in all spheres of Irish life. There is an onus on us all to encourage women to participate fully in all sectors of society and actively seek to remove any barriers whether real or perceived to facilitate this participation.

We should aim high and chart out an ambitious programme for the next four years.



*David Stanton TD  
Minister of State with special responsibility  
for Equality, Immigration & Integration*

## INTRODUCTION

The Vision statement below describes the kind of society we want Ireland to become for women and girls, and gives the long-term perspective to guide the actions we will take to transform Irish society.

*“an Ireland where all women enjoy equality with men  
and can achieve their full potential,  
while enjoying a safe and fulfilling life”*

As part of the Programme for a Partnership Government, the Government committed itself to the publication of an updated National Women’s Strategy by end 2016.

We propose that the next Strategy should set out to achieve the following over the four years from 2017 to 2020:

*to change attitudes and practices preventing women’s and girls’ full participation in education, employment and public life, at all levels, and to improve services for women and girls, with priority given to the needs of those experiencing, or at risk of experiencing, the poorest outcomes.*

Some information about the context is included in an Appendix to this paper. There you will find a snapshot of the situation of women and girls in Ireland, with international gender equality indexes for comparison. As the strategy will provide a roadmap for implementing its gender-related goals, a short note is also included on the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

It is not intended that the new National Women’s Strategy would replicate actions already included in other Strategies and Action Plans. The aim is that the new strategy would reflect current priority needs and enhance work already being done on a sectoral or thematic basis, for example in respect of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence.

## THE CONSULTATION PROCESS

The public consultation is open from 23 November 2016 and will conclude at 17:00 on Friday 27 January 2017.

All stakeholders are invited to comment on this consultation document, which is available on the Department’s website: [www.genderequality.ie](http://www.genderequality.ie)

Submissions may be made by email, with “**NWS Consultation 2016**” in the subject line, to the following mailbox: [genderequality@justice.ie](mailto:genderequality@justice.ie)

Alternatively, submissions may be made in writing to:

NWS Consultation 2016  
Gender Equality Division  
Department of Justice and Equality  
Bishops Square,  
Redmond's Hill,  
Dublin 2  
D02TD99

We are also holding a series of public consultation meetings on the new Strategy at which people may contribute their views. Details of dates and venues and how to register your interest in attending will be announced shortly on Gender Equality Division's website at [www.genderequality.ie](http://www.genderequality.ie).

If you have any queries, please contact Gender Equality Division at 01-4790200.

Please note that all submissions and comments submitted to the Department of Justice and Equality for this purpose may be subject to release under the Freedom of Information Act 2014 and may be placed on the Department's website.

When this phase of the public consultation closes, the submissions that have been received will be evaluated by the Strategy Committee established to assist the Department of Justice and Equality with preparing the Strategy. The new Strategy will be published early next year.

## QUESTIONS FOR CONSULTATION

We are inviting views on the following questions:

- a) what do you think are the issues for women and girls in Ireland that are most important to address over the next four years?
- b) do you agree with the high level objectives proposed below?
- c) what outcomes should we aim to achieve?
- d) what actions could be taken to advance those objectives?

## Proposed High-level Objectives

To advance gender equality in the period to 2020, five objectives are proposed as follows:

- ❖ **Advance socio-economic equality for women and girls;**
- ❖ **Improve women's and girls' physical and mental health;**
- ❖ **Promote women's and girls' equal and active citizenship;**
- ❖ **Advance women in leadership; and**
- ❖ **Embed gender equality in decision-making.**

## **What the Programme for Partnership Government Promises to Do to Promote Women's and Girls' Equality**

The new Strategy will incorporate the following measures, published in the Programme for a Partnership Government, which are intended to contribute to the advancement of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls in Ireland:

### **❖ Advance socio-economic equality for women and girls**

We will increase paid parental leave in the first year of birth (currently maternity leave is 26 weeks, plus 2 weeks' paternity leave to be introduced from September). Research shows children benefit most from parental care in the first year.

All parents, without exception, need support at some stage. We will look to publish a National Parenting Support Plan with a range of practical and supportive measures for all parents.

We will empower women to ensure that households headed by women are no longer at a higher risk of poverty. We will take measures to reduce the gender pay gap - inclusive of increasing investment in childcare, and reviewing the lower pay of women and gender inequality for senior appointments.

Seek to promote wage transparency by requiring companies of 50 and more to complete a wage survey.

Seek to promote a strengthened role of the Low Pay Commission in relation to the gender pay gap and in-work poverty.

Seek to promote locally delivered courses for women, comprising a series of training opportunities on self-development and work related skills, to assist a return to the labour market and promote entrepreneurship.

### **❖ Improve women's and girls' physical and mental health**

While we also increase the number of GP training places, we recognise the need to increase the number of therapists and other health professionals in our primary care centres to maximise the potential of services and provide maternity and long term illness cover for staff absences where possible.

We will also focus on a number of key programmes and strategies including .... the extension of Breastcheck to all women aged 65 to 69, ... Implementing the National Maternity Strategy, ... We will also propose legislation in the following areas ...the regulation of surrogacy and assisted human reproduction services...

We will implement in full the Istanbul Convention on tackling Domestic Violence and the commitments contained in the recently published Second National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence.

We will establish a Citizens' Assembly, within six months, and without participation by politicians, and with a mandate to look at a limited number of key issues over an extended time period. ... we will ask the Citizens' Assembly to make recommendations to the Dáil on further constitutional changes, including on the Eighth Amendment.

#### ❖ **Promote women's and girls' equal and active citizenship**

Following the introduction of legislation encouraging increased female participation in politics, we will publish an updated National Women's Strategy by end 2016, further promoting women's participation in decision making.

Recognising that women and girls are disproportionately affected by violent conflict, we will ensure the timely implementation of Ireland's second National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security and support international efforts to protect women and girls in conflict zones.

Building on Ireland's strong track record of supporting developing countries including in areas like climate justice, human rights, gender and education, Ireland recognises that vulnerable communities need very considerable assistance in adapting to climate change.

Specifically, we will prioritise the need to address the gap in female participation in the Defence Forces.

Seek to promote an increased level of female participation in our Defence Forces, with the goal of doubling the rate of participation from the current 6% to 12% in the next 5 years.

#### ❖ **Advance women in leadership**

Seek to promote increased female representation on state boards to 40%.

In November 2014, a new system for appointments to state boards, including an independent, centralised application and short-listing process run by the Public Appointments Service was introduced. In the first year of operation, over 4,200 applications were submitted. Under this system, in making board appointments, ministers can only appoint applicants who have been vetted and shortlisted by the Public Appointments Service. The PAS will be asked to take account of diversity and balance, including gender, geography, etc. The Government will now strengthen this system by putting it on a statutory footing by the end of 2016. In addition, the process will be extended to require ministerial nominees for the role of chairs of boards to be vetted and have their suitability for appointment confirmed by the Public Appointments Service. Furthermore, nominees for chairs of state boards will, following confirmation of their suitability by the Public Appointment Service, be required to have their nomination ratified by the relevant Oireachtas Committee prior to their appointment being made by Government. The operational effectiveness of the new arrangements will be reviewed after 12 months.

#### ❖ **Embed gender equality in decision-making**

Developing a new Integrated Framework for Social Inclusion, to tackle inequality and poverty. Our Integrated Framework will outline measures to help eliminate any persisting

discrimination on grounds of gender, age, family status, marital status, sexual orientation, race, disability, religion or membership of the Traveller Community. It will draw on existing as well as new strategies, in particular the (i) New National Women's Strategy, (ii) New National Disability Inclusion Strategy, (iii) Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities, (iv) National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy, and (v) New Action Plan for Educational Inclusion.

We will develop the process of budget and policy proofing as a means of advancing equality, reducing poverty and strengthening economic and social rights. We will ensure the institutional arrangements are in place to support equality and gender proofing in the independent fiscal and budget office and within key government departments and to draw on the expertise of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC) to support the proofing process. For Budget 2017 the Budget and Finance Committee will be tasked with looking at gender and equality proofing budget submissions and proposals with independent expertise (including the IHREC) to assist where necessary.



## APPENDIX

### Snapshot of the situation of women and girls in Ireland

Between 2006 when the previous Strategy was drafted and 2016, the female population in Ireland increased from 2.119 million to 2.406 million.

Many of today's challenges are familiar, such as the over-representation of women as unpaid providers of care within the home which continues to be a barrier to economic independence for many and contributes to increased and persisting risk of poverty.

The proportion of women aged 30-34 who have a third-level qualification has increased from 48.9% in 2007 to 58.6% in 2015 and younger women are, on average, better educated than their male counterparts. However, gender stereotypical choices continue to feature strongly in education at both second level and higher education. Such choices often have consequences limiting women's future career options and progression, and their lifetime earnings.

As the overall economic situation is improving, there is concern to ensure this recovery reduces inequality. Particular areas of concern are child poverty, the gender pay gap (13.9% in 2014), and the gender pension gap (36% in 2013).

Addressing violence against women and improving women's access to justice continue to be urgent priorities. New technology has facilitated the growth of new forms of violence, directed at young women and girls in particular, such as online harassment on social media and cyber-violence, and can have a significant international dimension.

While some advances have been made, women continue to be under-represented in key decision-making roles. Sectors identified for special attention include politics, where statutory gender quotas for general election candidates first came into effect in the February 2016 election; higher education, where the Higher Education Authority has recently completed a gender equality review; the senior civil and public service; the executives and boards of large companies; and leadership in the arts and sport.

- The proportion of females in consistent poverty increased from 7.2% in 2005 to 8.3% in 2014. The corresponding figures for men are from 6.7% to 7.8%. Over the same period, the proportion of lone parent households in consistent poverty fell from 26.9% to 22.1%.
- The proportion of girls sitting the Leaving Certificate examination who took the Mathematics examination at higher level increased from 13.5% in 2011 to 24.8% in 2015. For boys the corresponding increase was from 16.2% to 27.8%.
- In 2007, 48.9% of women and 37.8% of men in the 30-34 age group had a third-level qualification. By 2015, this had increased to 58.6% of women and 45.1% of men.

- In 2007 the employment rate for persons aged 20-64 was 64.5% for females as compared to 82.9% for males. The employment rate fell during the recession, particularly for men, before beginning to recover from 2013. In 2015 the female employment was 62.6%, as compared to 75.9% for males. By Q2 2016, the employment rate of women aged 20-64 had increased to 64.1%.
  - Between 2003 and 2009, the proportion of all employees working in enterprises with equality policies and/or action plans increased from 75% to 84%.
  - The proportion of early stage entrepreneurs among the adult female population, which was 4.0% in 2010 was 4.23% in 2014. For males, the corresponding values were 11.2% in 2010 and 8.9% in 2014.
  - The gender pay gap in Ireland fell from 17.2% in 2006 to 13.9% in 2014. However it was 12.2% in 2012.
  - The gender pension gap stood at 36% in 2013.
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- The total fertility rate<sup>1</sup> (TFR) for women in Ireland was 1.95 in 2014, compared to 1.94 in 2006.
  - The teenage birth rate halved between 2001 and 2013, from 20.0 to 10.4 births per thousand females aged 15-19.
  - Female life expectancy at birth increased from 81.6 years in 2006 to 82.8 years in 2011; and at age 65 years from 19.8 years to 20.6 years. For males, life expectancy at birth increased from 76.8 years in 2006 to 78.4 years in 2011, and at age 65 years from 16.6 to 17.7 years.
  - The proportion of adult women who felt they had experienced discrimination in the previous two years remained constant at 13% between 2004 and 2014. For men, the rates were 12% and 11%.
  - 26% of women surveyed in Ireland in 2014 reported having experienced physical and/or sexual violence by a partner or non-partner since the age of 15.
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- Between 2011 and 2013, the proportion of girls aged 16-19 who actively participated in sport on a weekly basis decreased slightly from 67.7% to 66.2%, while for boys in this age group participation decreased significantly from 92.5% to 83.1%. Over the same period, participation by women aged 35-44 increased from 34.0% to 43.8% and by men in the same age group from 48.7% to 50.2%. (Irish Sports Monitor).
  - In 2014, 60% of women aged over 15 years, as compared to 40% of men, regularly participated in artistic or creative activities. However, 35% of women as compared to 23% of men reported difficulties taking part in arts activities.
  - In 2013, 28.7% of adult women were involved in volunteering, with civil society, community groups, religious organisations, sporting or cultural organisations, as compared to 28.1% of men. In terms of time spent, women contributed 64% of hours on direct volunteer work, compared to 36% of hours on organisation-based volunteer work.

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<sup>1</sup> The total fertility rate is the mean number of children that would be born alive to a woman during her lifetime if she were to pass through her childbearing years conforming to the age-specific fertility rates of a given year. A total fertility rate of around 2.1 live births per woman is considered to be the replacement level in developed countries.

- Between 2006 and 2015, the proportion of State funding to all qualified political parties spent on participation by women in political activity increased from 2.0% to 3.3%.

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- Women TDs, as a proportion of all members of Dáil Éireann, increased from 13% in 2005 to 22% in 2016.
- In 2013, women were 31.8% of the judiciary. By 2016, this had increased to 35%.
- Between 2005 and 2016, the representation of women on State Boards increased from 34% to 37.8%.
- The proportion of women among non-executive directors of companies listed on the ISEQ index of Irish shares increased from 6% in 2007 to 16% in 2016.
- Women held 23% of Secretary General level posts and 26% of Assistant Secretary level posts in the Civil Service in 2014, as compared to 19% and 19% in 2007. Over the same period, the proportion of Principal Officer posts held by women increased from 26% to 36%.

## International Indexes

A number of international comparative gender equality indexes also exist which offer a way to compare progress in Ireland with that being made in other countries. Each index looks at a distinct list of parameters and the choice of parameters affects the outcome for each country.

- The European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) **EU Gender Equality Index** provides an easily interpretable measure of gender equality in the EU across 6 key policy domains – work, money, knowledge, time, power and health, and two satellite domains (violence and intersecting inequalities). The current Index, published in June 2015, shows the progression from 2005 to 2010 and to 2012. On a scale of 1 to 100, with 100 representing full equality between women and men, Ireland scored 56.5 overall and ranked 8<sup>th</sup> in the EU. Across the six domains, Ireland's score was 65.8 for work, 79.0 for money, 54.3 for knowledge, 52.0 for time, 31.4 for power, and 95.2 for health.
- The **United Nations Gender Inequality Index (GII)** is a composite measure reflecting inequality in achievements between women and men in three dimensions: reproductive health, empowerment and the labour market. In the most recent index relating to 2013, Ireland is ranked in 11<sup>th</sup> place out of 187 countries.
- The UN Human Development Index (HDI) is a summary measure of average achievement in key dimensions of human development: a long and healthy life, being knowledgeable and having a decent standard of living. The values for females and males are compared in the **UN Gender Development Index (GDI)**. In the current index, for 2013, Ireland is ranked joint 6<sup>th</sup> out of 188 countries.
- The **Global Gender Gap Index**, introduced by the World Economic Forum in 2006, looks at gender-based disparities in economic participation and opportunity; educational attainment; health and survival and political empowerment. In the most recent Index relating to 2015, Ireland is ranked in 5<sup>th</sup> place out of 145 economies.

## The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

“Transforming Our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”, with the integration of the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development at its core, was agreed by the UN membership and adopted by world leaders in 2015. It consists of 17 goals and 169 targets.

Women have a critical role to play in all of the sustainable development goals. This is recognised in a specific goal (SDG 5) to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. Women’s equality and empowerment, as objectives and as part of the solution, are also mainstreamed into other goals.

### **SDG 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls**

#### **Goal 5 Targets and Means of implementation**

5.1 End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere

5.2 Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation.

5.3 Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation.

5.4 Recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate.

5.5 Ensure women’s full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life.

5.6 Ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights as agreed in accordance with the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome documents of their review conferences.

5.a Undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, financial services, inheritance and natural resources, in accordance with national laws.

5.b Enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology, to promote the empowerment of women.

5.c Adopt and strengthen sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls at all levels.

For more information, please refer to <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/>